

reporter. Work to get other reporters interested in the story; maybe they'll cover it more fairly.

In general, there isn't a thing you can demand of a newspaper in regard to tone unless you can show that the same reporter has continued to write stories with a biased tone over a sustained period. If the coverage is truly unfair and the reporter doesn't seem to care what you say, you should talk with the reporter's editor.

Inserting missing material

Sometimes reporters miss a vital point. The best way to approach this is to call the reporter and thank them for their interest in the issue. Speak rationally about what may have been left out and how you can help the reporter get the rest of the story. Don't make demands. Be nice and explain how the missing piece may actually help readers better understand the situation.

Letters to the editor

Sometimes you can fill in a gap or correct a problem with tone with a letter to the editor. If a letter is to have any impact at all, then it needs to follow the original news story as quickly as possible. That means getting the letter to the newspaper before close of business on the day the original story ran. If your letter runs days after the original story, then most readers will have forgotten the original story and your point will be missed. Letters to the editor should be written in consultation with the public information office.

Op-Eds

Op-Eds are editorials that appear on the opposite side of the editorial page and are submitted by those wishing to express a more lengthy, thoughtful opinion than a letter-to-the-editor may allow. An op-ed is another good way to respond to a story that has gaps or problems with tone. Just as with the letter to the editor, a response op-ed should be submitted as quickly as possible after the original story runs. The public information office should review any op-eds.

FOUR: CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Not the Norm:

Under normal circumstances, we encourage court employees to speak freely with reporters about their areas of expertise. That's not the case in a crisis. Coordination of communication--ensuring that we are giving out correct information with one voice--is essential during a crisis.

What is a Crisis?

The dictionary defines "crisis" as an unstable condition in which an abrupt or decisive change is impending. Natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes or floods as well as man-made troubles such as courthouse bombs or shootings are all crises. Specific crisis communication plans may be developed for particular events.

How Do We Communicate During a Crisis?

It is essential that during a crisis, everyone speaks with one voice and gives out information that is absolutely correct. For that reason, all media requests for information must be directed to one point--the public information office. Communications staff will determine who should respond and what information is available. Periodic news releases will be issued. Where appropriate, media briefings will be held to give reporters access to high-level officials and field staff.



How Do We Prepare For a Crisis?

The public information office will maintain a regular listing of emergency numbers, including after-hours numbers for members of the media and court management staff. You may prepare specific notification lists and priorities for a particular issue.

The public information office can work with individual offices to develop crisis communication plans for specific problems. That way, you'll have a